

3.14 VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual resources include vistas from land or water that are valuable because they are in scarce supply or are characteristic of the area and contribute to the quality of life and cultural character of the area. The Proposed Action and its alternatives would affect views from both the land and the water. This analysis documents the existing visual condition of the Biloxi peninsula in the proximity of the Proposed Action and its alternatives. The ROI for visual resources includes the character-defining features of the landscape that would be modified as a result of the Proposed Action and its alternatives.

3.14.1 Methodology

The methodology for this visual resource analysis is derived from guidance prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service (USDA, Forest Service, 1995). The process involves evaluating the visual impacts of the Proposed Action or its alternatives on a scene or view or landscape considered to be a visual resource. The visual resource is analyzed in terms of the relative loss of scenic integrity due to the alteration of character-defining or dominant features in the existing view resulting from the Proposed Action or its alternatives. The analysis also considers the pre-existing level of human alteration to the view, the level of public exposure to the view, or the community's sensitivity to the view.

Scenic integrity is rated in four levels: high, moderate, low, and very low, as follows:

- High—landscapes where the valued landscape character appears intact, and deviations or alterations repeat the form, line, color, texture, and pattern common to the landscape character to such a degree and at such scale that the deviations or alterations are not evident;
- Moderate—landscapes where the valued landscape character appears slightly altered, but noticeable alterations remain visually subordinate to the landscape character being viewed;
- Low—landscapes where deviations begin to dominate the valued landscape character but that borrow valued attributes such as the size, shape, edge effect, and pattern of the natural vegetation or architecture outside the landscape being viewed. Deviations have their own sense of order and are not incompatible with the valued character of the scene; and
- Very Low—landscapes where the valued landscape character being viewed appears extremely altered. Deviations are extremely dominant and borrow little if any form, line, color, texture, pattern, or scale from the landscape character.

Table 3.14-1 summarizes how these ratings apply to scenic integrity criteria for dominance, degree of deviation, and intactness of landscape character.

**Table 3.14-1
Scenic Integrity**

Criteria for Scenic Integrity	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
Dominant Feature	Landscape Character	Landscape Character	Human Alterations	Human Alterations
Degree of Alteration	None Evident	Evident but not Dominant	Dominant	Extremely Dominant
Intactness of Landscape Character	Landscape Character Largely Intact	Slightly Altered and Character Expression Moderate	Altered and Low Expression of Character	Extremely Altered

Source: Staff analysis.

Eight representative viewpoints, or camera locations, were chosen for the scenic integrity analysis and are shown in Figure 3.14-1. Viewpoints 1 through 3 pertain to Alternatives 3, 4 and 5, while viewpoints 4 through 8 pertain to Alternative 3. The viewpoints were selected based on the general public's level of exposure to these views due to public activities and land uses, including residential, recreational, institutional, cultural, or commercial uses. For instance, the viewpoint of motorists crossing the I-110 bridge to the south facing the Alternative 3 locations would create a high level of public exposure because of the volume and frequency of traffic. Although the selected viewpoints vary in terms of their public exposure and visual sensitivity, they are afforded the same level of analysis. The photographs of the views from the eight viewpoints are presented in Section 4.14.

3.14.2 Setting and Context

The vast majority of land within the visual resource ROI is developed. The passage of the Mississippi Gaming Control Act of 1990, and subsequent county approval, have opened the coast of Mississippi to legalized gambling (Meyer-Arendt and Abusalih, 1994). To a large degree the introduction of casino gambling to the Mississippi gulf coast has been responsible for a complete change in the aesthetic character of Biloxi. During the last 10 years, Biloxi has undergone significant growth along the US 90 coastline and Bayview Drive. Before 1990, US 90, known locally as "the Strip," was dominated by small commercial establishments. Many of these commercial establishments remain open and include a range of visible architectural features, from large animal reproductions to traditional shop fronts. Currently, high-rise casinos dominate the US 90 beachfront and bayfront views of Biloxi.

3.14.3 Potentially Affected Viewsheds

A viewshed is composed of everything that can be seen from a fixed vantage point (or camera location) when looking in one direction.

Broadwater Site

The viewshed that encompasses the Broadwater site contains a varied pattern of landscape conditions. Views from viewpoints 1 through 3 are shown in Figures 4.14-2, 4.14-6, and 4.14-10 in Section 4.14. Although the vast majority of land in the surrounding area has been developed, wooded vegetation on the north side of US 90 provides a buffer and visual barrier to most of the low-density residential development in the area. The dominant features in each of the Broadwater site viewsheds are the Gulf of Mexico and US 90. Both of these elements are occasionally punctuated by one or more of the four high-rise casinos situated along US 90 and the coastline, including the Treasure Bay Casino, located just east of the Broadwater site. Currently, the gaming structure for the Treasure Bay Casino is a visually obtrusive model of a pirate ship. The visibility of the high-rise casinos from the Broadwater site is often restricted by meteorological conditions. Due to these existing conditions, the scenic integrity of the views from viewpoints 1 through 3 is considered to be low.

Section 3.7 describes the visual and aesthetic environment of Beauvoir, the historic home of Jefferson Davis, and the Southern Memorial Park Cemetery located adjacent to the Broadwater site.

Alternative 3 Sites

The viewpoints for the Alternative 3 sites are located either across the bay to the north or on the bridges on the north and east sides of Biloxi. Views from viewpoints 4 through 8 are shown in Figures 4.14-14, 4.14-16, 4.14-18, 4.14-20, and 4.14-22 in Section 4.14. The viewsheds of the Back Bay shoreline from all of these viewpoints are dominated by urban development and would not be considered scenic. On Biloxi's north and east shore, maritime and industrial uses dominate the view from the north and are closely flanked by various types of urban residential development. The exceptions to the low-rise character of development along the shoreline are the existing casino hotels, which are easily discernible to motorists approaching Biloxi from the north on I-110 or east on US 90. Due to the contrasts that exist between the distant hotel, casino, and industrial development and the natural and maritime shoreline, the scenic integrity of the Alternative 3 sites is considered to be moderate.

Section 3.7 describes the visual and aesthetic environment of the Old Brick House, a 150-year-old historic home owned by the City of Biloxi and located adjacent to Site F.

Destination Broadwater EIS City of Biloxi Area Photograph Locations

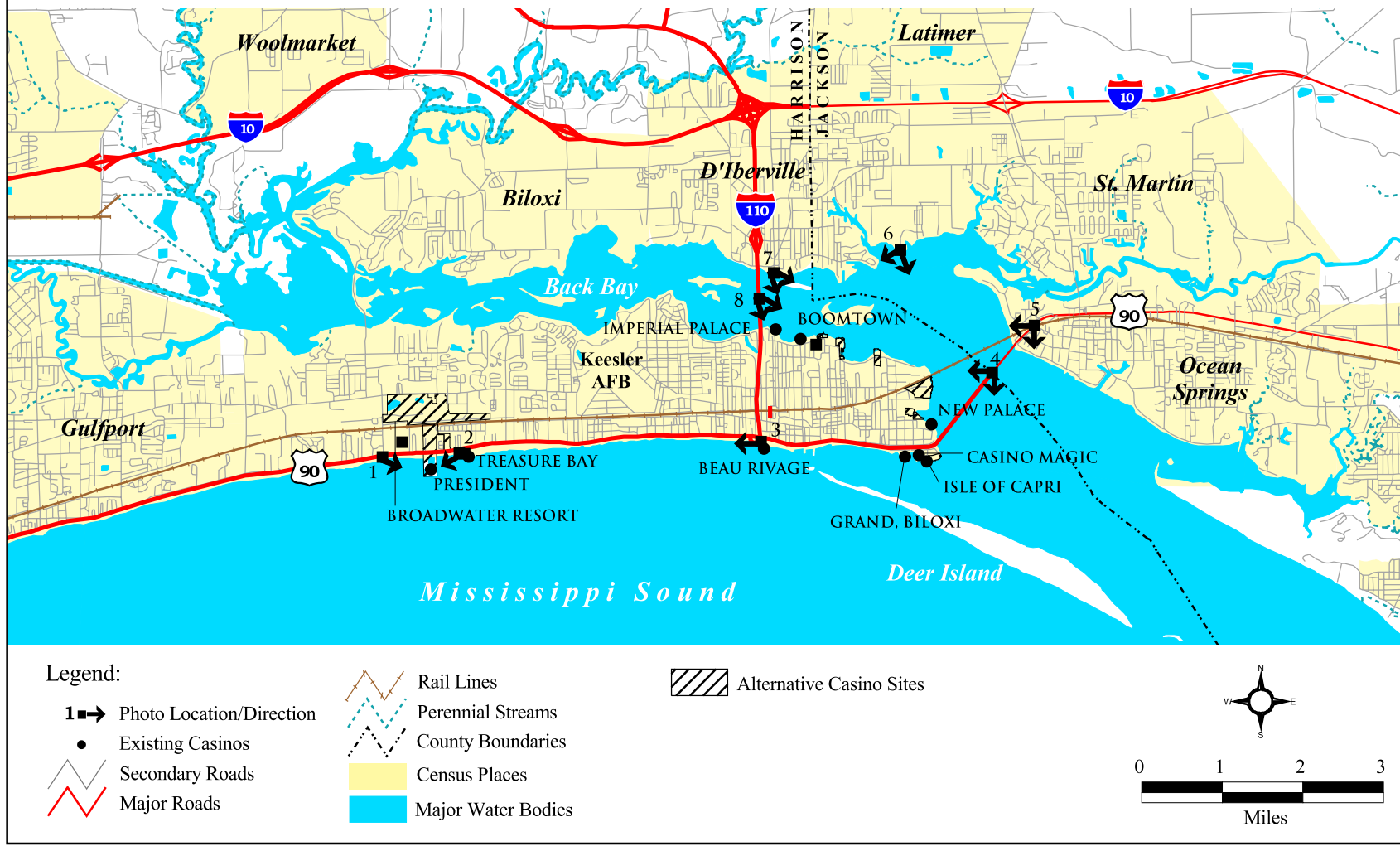


Figure 3.14-1: City of Biloxi area photograph locations